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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 6797  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 5291  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 000458

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KJUS](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#)  
SUBJECT: THAI POLITICAL ROUNDUP: DEMONSTRATION,  
NON-RECONCILIATION, ACCUSATION, RESIGNATION, AND OBFUSCATION

REF: A. BANGKOK 247 (PRESSURE ON GOVERNMENT)  
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 79 (BY-ELECTIONS)  
[1](#)C. 08 BANGKOK 3236 (POLICE BLAMED FOR VIOLENCE)

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Classified By: DCM James F. Entwistle, reason: 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (SBU) Anti-government "redshirt" protesters plan a large rally at Government House on February 24. Opposition legislators unsuccessfully floated the idea of a "national reconciliation" bill that would provide amnesty to disenfranchised politicians. Opposition figures continue to file complaints against the Abhisit government; the Election Commission dismissed a complaint alleging that PM Abhisit had improper dealings with a senior politician who is ineligible to hold office. Negative publicity about the government providing disaster victims with relief supplies that included rotten fish led to the resignation of the Social Development and Human Security Minister. A fact-finding committee's report on a violent October 2008 clash between police and People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) protesters failed to ascribe blame to any individual or organization. End Summary.

REDSHIRT DEMONSTRATION AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE

[1](#)2. (SBU) Pro-Thaksin "redshirts" plan to hold a large demonstration outside of the Government House compound in Bangkok starting February 24. Most observers expect high-profile redshirt political activities to continue through the ASEAN Summit, which open February 28. Redshirt leaders have publicly stated they will not try to occupy the Government House compound. Police anticipate tens of thousands of protesters, and Army personnel plan to assist police in providing security. The last large redshirt protest in Bangkok was peaceful. Abhisit has moved his February 24 cabinet meeting to the coastal town of Hua Hin; the government attributed the shift to the upcoming ASEAN Summit (February 27-March 1) at the same venue, denying it was motivated by the protest.

NO QUICK AMNESTY FOR "BANNED" POLITICIANS

[1](#)3. (SBU) Legislators from the pro-Thaksin Puea Thai party

recently publicly floated their intent to introduce a "national reconciliation" bill with provisions that would grant an amnesty to the scores of politicians who were disenfranchised because of Constitutional Court rulings that dissolved their political parties. (According to constitutional provisions, the executive board members of any party dissolved by the Court lose their right to vote for a five-year period; the right to vote is a prerequisite for holding political office, so many Thais refer to these former executives as "banned" politicians.) It was the determination of the pro-Thaksin Samak government to introduce similar amnesty legislation in 2008 that led to the resumption of yellow-shirt protests by the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) in May 2008, and many people feared the bill would promote renewed discord, not reconciliation. Although numerous parties in the governing coalition have informal patrons who are disenfranchised and presumably would want to regain their rights, the Puea Thai proposal failed to garner support from other parties, and the Puea Thai MPs appear to have set aside this proposal.

#### ELECTION COMMISSION DISMISSES COMPLAINT

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¶4. (SBU) The Election Commission dismissed a complaint that alleged inappropriate interactions between Abhisit Vejjajiva and "banned" (see above) former Thai Rak Thai executive Newin Chidchob in the run-up to Abhisit's election as Prime Minister. The Election Commission appeared not to view Newin's informal political maneuvering as illegal. Some in the pro-Thaksin Puea Thai party denounced the Election Commission's decision, even as groups of Puea Thai MPs flew to Hong Kong to meet with former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who was disenfranchised by the same Court ruling

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that affected Newin.

¶5. (SBU) Puea Thai continues to find ways to place pressure on the Abhisit administration, though it remains unclear how much traction the charges will have. Puea Thai figures have alleged that in 2004, politically active businessman Prachai Leophairatana, in transactions of dubious propriety, funneled approximately 250 million Baht (approximately six million USD, at then-prevailing exchange rates) to figures associated with the Democrat Party (note: the law limiting political donations to 10 million baht only went into effect after the 2006 coup and thus would not apply to Prachai's alleged donations. End note). Puea Thai figures also raised the financial disclosures of Finance Minister Korn Chatikavanij, questioning skeptically why his reported wealth declined over the last year by roughly 15 percent (Note: Korn, who declared assets of over 800 million baht, or \$23 million, explained declining stock values were at issue. End note). They accused Prime Minister Abhisit of seeking to conceal assets, since Abhisit had disclosed he owned a Honda Odyssey in January 2008, but in his most recent declaration of wealth he listed a Mitsubishi Space Wagon and omitted the Odyssey.

¶6. (C) One of Abhisit's Deputy Secretaries General, Isra Sunthornvut, confirmed to us recently that the opposition was filing formal complaints against the Democrats on any conceivable grounds, no matter how trivial. Isra acknowledged that the courts seemed generally more favorably disposed toward Democrats than they had been toward the pro-Thaksin camp, but, citing an adverse determination by the National Counter-Corruption Commission against then-Governor of Bangkok Apirak (ref B), Isra contended the Democrats were not invulnerable, and it was necessary to defend vigorously against every accusation.

#### CABINET MEMBER RESIGNS

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¶7. (SBU) Democrat Witoon Nambutr resigned from his position as Social Development and Human Security Minister in early

February, following revelations that state relief packages for southern flood victims contained fish unsuitable for consumption. Democrat Issara Somchai succeeded Witoon in the cabinet position. Witoon came under heavy public criticism, with opposition MPs claiming corruption in connection with the use of inedible fish, although Witoon claimed the fish in question had been donated charitably, not procured with government funds. Meanwhile, Deputy Interior Minister Boonjong Wongtrairat (from the Phumjai Thai party), who faced a potentially more serious allegation in connection with his distributing state aid in the form of cash with his name card attached (ref A), remains in his cabinet position.

NO BLAME LAID IN REPORT ON OCTOBER 7 CLASH

18. (SBU) The RTG on February 20 publicly released the report of the fact-finding committee (appointed by then-Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat) on the violent clash between the police and PAD protesters that took place at the parliament on October 7, 2008. The report failed to attribute blame to any individual or organization for the two deaths and hundreds of injuries. The National Counter-Corruption Commission is also conducting a separate investigation into the incident. An earlier report (ref C) from the National Human Rights Commission had blamed the police for the violence.

JOHN